

REMARKS

Reconsideration and allowance are respectfully requested. Applicant has amended claims 1, 4, 5, and 17. Claims 1, 4, 5, and 17 stand rejected. No new matter has been added.

Formal issues

Applicant has amended the specification and the drawings to correct minor informalities. Entry is respectfully requested.

Applicant has also provided a translation of EP 0579535 to Queveau for the Examiner's convenience.

§ 112 rejection

Claims 1, 4, 5 and 17 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 112, second paragraph, as being indefinite. Applicant has amended the claims to obviate this rejection. More particularly, Applicant has amended independent claim 1 to clarify that the vehicle door includes a seal arrangement.

§ 103 rejection

Claims 1, 4, 5 and 17 were rejected under EP 0579535 to Queveau ("Queveau") in view of U.S. Patent No. 6,296,296 to Sekishiro et al. ("Sekishiro"). Applicant respectfully traverses this rejection.

Applicant has amended independent claim 1 to clarify that the trim panel defines a waterproof barrier between a wet space and a dry space in a vehicle door. The trim panel 4 in Queveau is not designed to act as a waterproof barrier like the claimed trim panel because, as shown the Figure, the trim panel 4 clearly has several openings covered by grills 61, 93. Grills, by definition, have openings that would allow water to flow through. Queveau also shows an opening 44 in the trim panel 4 that allows a cladding sheet of a support panel 3 to be exposed (translation of specification, p. 3, lines 22-24).

Further, it is clear in the Figure that the opening 44 is significantly larger than the door handle 8, making it impossible to seal the door handle 8 to the trim panel 4. In fact, Queveau

specifically states that the door handle 8 and its associated cap 81 are secured to the support panel 3, not the trim panel 4 (p. 4, line 16 to p. 5, line 8). Queveau even contemplates manufacturing the support panel 3, which includes the door handle 8, separately from the trim panel 4 and the door shell and then assembly the trim panel 4, support panel 3, and the door shell together at the last minute in a just-in-time process (p. 4, lines 21-28). Manufacturing in this manner makes it impossible to seal the door handle 8 relative to the trim panel 4, particularly in view of the relative configurations of the door handle 8 and the openings in the trim panel 4. Thus, nothing in Queveau remotely suggests a trim panel that defines a waterproof barrier or a manually actuatable element that is sealed relative to the trim panel like the claimed invention.

With respect to Sekishiro, Applicant respectfully disagrees with the Office Action's characterization of the grommet 24. Claim terms must be given their plain meaning and "read as they would be interpreted by those of ordinary skill in the art." MPEP § 2111.01. Multiple dictionaries describe a grommet as a metal or other rigid ring used to reinforce an opening (Appendix A). Although a grommet is used to protect the opening, the word "grommet" would not reasonably be interpreted by one of ordinary skill to cover the claimed seal arrangement because all reasonable meanings of the word cover only rigid reinforcement structures, not seals.

Thus, neither Queveau nor Sekishiro show a trim panel acting as a waterproof barrier or a sealing arrangement of any kind. The Office Action therefore fails to establish a prima facie case of obviousness with respect to claims 1, 4, 5 and 17, and withdrawal of the rejection is respectfully requested.

Applicant has added new claim 20, which is identical in scope to originally-filed claim 3. New claim 20 depends on patentable claim 1 and is therefore patentable for the reasons explained above. Entry and allowance are respectfully requested.

All objections and rejections having been addressed, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in condition for allowance, and a Notice to that effect is earnestly solicited.

Applicant believes that no additional fees are necessary, however, the Commissioner is authorized to charge Deposit Account No. 50-1482 in the name of Carlson, Gaskey & Olds for any additional fees or credit the account for any overpayment.

Respectfully submitted,

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APPENDIX A



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grom·met **Pronunciation Key** (grŏm'īt) also
grum·met (grŭm'-)
n.

- a. A reinforced eyelet, as in cloth or leather, through which a fastener may be passed.
- b. A small metal or plastic ring used to reinforce such an eyelet.
2. *Nautical.* A loop of rope or metal used for securing the edge of a sail to its stay.

[Probably from obsolete French gromette, gormette, chain joining the ends of a bit, from Old French, from gourmer, to bridle.]

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grommet

\Grom"met\, n. [F. gourmette curb, curb chain, fr. gourmer to curb, thump, beat; cf. Armor. gromm a curb, gromma to curb.] 1. A ring formed by twisting on itself a single strand of an unlaid rope; also, a metallic eyelet in or for a sail or a mailbag. Sometimes written grummet.

2. (Mil.) A ring of rope used as a wad to hold a cannon ball in place.

[Try Merriam-Webster Unabridged.]

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grommet

n : a metal ring for lining a small hole to permit the attachment of cords or lines [syn: cringle, eyelet, loop]

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